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“Steady drops hollow the stone.”

Tracing the Life of a Search

John Fetzer and the Seeds of the Fetzer Institute
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“As we go through my life story, you’re going to find that the word “search” is one of the paramount activities of my life. I’ve been searching all my life—not essentially on one subject but on many subjects. I’ve never been able to rest on cursory knowledge about anything—it must be in depth and it must be understood. You’re going to find practically in the whole history of my life that I’ve been searching and searching—the evolutionary search. That led me to pioneering into things that no one had ever done before... (John

Fetzer, 1982)

“Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you” (Matthew 7.7)

Christopher Bamford

1. The Field

To search is the human vocation. It is what human beings are called to. Consciously or unconsciously, implicitly explicitly, successfully or unsuccessfully, every human life is a hieroglyph of a search.

As a human life, searching involves the whole person, body, soul, and spirit. It is multileveled: psycho-spiritual, epistemological, ontological, cosmological and scientific, and even aesthetic. It is all of these simultaneously, transforming both the searcher and the world he or she lives in. In the end, searcher and world, searcher and what is sought, are one. To search is then not a solipsistic affair, practiced only in the searcher's soul, as if this were separate from the world. **Because the soul is relational, to search is to realize the relational reality of the world.** For this reason, if the search is realized, the self-realization of the soul and the self-realization of the world arise as one, as a unity.

Precisely because the search encompasses all life, it is difficult to describe. Its traces lie hidden everywhere in a person's life and are only brought to light with difficulty. Indications manifest only hesitantly and after long maturation. Only slowly and partially, if at all, do they give up their secret. Always there remain gaps. The life that is the vessel and the matter of the search always remains a mystery: a question framed against a ground of unknowing. Like mathematics (or music or science), a life is a kind of language and ultimately resists translation, for languages refer only to themselves. There is no one-to-one correspondence between them. Each is their own their own world. Different language, different lives, make different worlds.

Every search is thus unique, embodied in a particular, individual human life. This is as true of a one called to be a scientist, an artist, a philosopher, as one called to be an entrepreneur, a mother, a priest, a plumber, or an auto mechanic. No life excludes the possibility of the search. Anyone can be a seeker, and, whatever form their life takes, whatever field their relationships encompass, their search will be shaped accordingly. In other words, the life, the search, and what is found is a single process: the life is always exemplary of the search and conversely. And what is found cannot be separated from experience, the process of finding, immanent in the life and the search.

For the search makes its facts by experience. This means that knowing and its "facts" are always historical, biographical, and individualized. At the same time, no one undertakes the search alone. There are always family members, friends and colleagues, mentors encountered and authors read, fellow travellers met, and so on. By this means what is individual finds its place in a network, and in a language at once both private and collective, which makes it possible for us to understand at least a part of it.

2. The Bones of the Search

The Delphic oracle enjoins, *gnoti seauton*, "Know thyself." Aristotle, in the first sentence of his *Metaphysics*, proclaims: "All human beings desire by nature to know." Thus, the two great questions are: *Who am I?* And: *What is real?*

Leaving aside for the moment what "to know" means, Aristotle, linking love and knowledge, suggests that it is love that, initially through the senses, that opens the path of human consciousness to knowing, and that our desire to know—our love giving rise to knowledge—is our deepest nature as human beings. Not just scientists, artists of all sorts, mystics, and scholars, but all are called in their inmost selves to be seekers, lovers, and what they seek is to know. Whether they realize their calling and to what extent is only a question of individual destiny.

Aristotle, of course, was not referring to the modern knower of objects, who seeks "information," with a view to calculation, manipulation, and control of the so-called outer, "objective" world. Rather, he was affirming that, insofar as we are human, we are potential beings who, as potential beings, have the capacity to realize both our own and the world's potentiality from moment to moment, as love leads us to know. In this view, it is desire or love that opens us both to what we are not yet, to possibility, and to what the world is not yet, its potentiality. Affirming the primacy of potentiality over actuality, love, in response to which the search begins and which is always for what is potential or "not yet," gives us access to the process of the world's becoming. Knowing (and the search to know) is thus a path—a pathway that we walk, a verb, an activity. In the words of Bruno Latour, it is "a vector of transformation."

“Knowledge,” however, is only one way of describing what human beings seek. “Beauty” is another. “Meditate this well,” the Persian illuminist theosopher, Suhrawardi writes:

It is Beauty that all beings seek. All their efforts are given over to rising to Beauty. But Beauty, which is the object of such universal aspiration, is difficult to reach, for it is impossible to attain Beauty without the mediation of Love, who does not open the way to it to just anyone. Love does not make his dwelling just anywhere. Love does not show himself to every gaze. If Love happens to notice the sign in someone that that person is fit for the felicity of Love, then Love sends Sadness—his intimate and his messenger—in order that Sadness might purify the dwelling....

What holds for Beauty also holds for the other transcendentals, “Goodness” and “Truth.” Inverting the order of sadness and love, Ibn Arabi, for instance, names Sadness as the source of Love, from which creation itself will arise. In this version, before anything is, the One who will be Creator, resting alone in divine solitude, is saddened by his loneliness. And, from his sadness at not being known, the world arises as a divine sigh of existentiating love and compassion—through which still today it can be searched and known: creator and created one-in two, two-in-one, depending upon each other in mysterious ways, determined by love, and continuing in love from beginning to end.

In another metaphor, as Socrates explained in the *Cratylus*, love or desire enters us as an “influx”—a cosmic gift—that, flowing into us from without opens us to new experience. Such was the teaching, too, of Socrates’ teacher, Diotima, the priestess of Mantinea, who, as recounted in the *Symposium*, initiated Socrates into the mysteries of love and beauty by which he could rise from the world of appearance to the reality of being.

Thus sadness at our separation from the source prepares us, while love breaks open our capacity to search. Broken open, we become the medium through which, while actualizing our own potentiality, we actualize the process through which “reality” itself actualizes, evolves, and reveals itself to us. Individual and world or cosmos thereby become intertwined: a unity, a single process. To search, then, which is the work of desire or love, is not just an engine of personal transformation and engagement with the world, but also actively participates in the evolutionary unfolding of the processes of creation itself. It is all one evolutionary becoming. The seeker creates not just the search but also equally and more importantly co-creates what is found.

Behind all this lies intuition that the love to know intimates an absence or lack at the core of being itself—that, without human participation, being would remain unfulfilled. It is difficult to say what this lack, which humans experience as need, is. We might call it “otherness.” From this point of view, Being, which is the same (homogenous), lacks otherness (difference). This is one meaning of the Islamic saying attributed to God, “I was a hidden treasure and I desired to be known and so I created creation (human beings) so as to be known by them.” Certainly, if being lacked nothing, there would be nothing: no creation, no images, nothing to say, and nothing to know. As we come to know and realize love and the world in ourselves, the world is and becomes through that love. The more we love, the more we search, forever naming the unnamable, catching a glimpse poised between appearance and disappearance, actuality and potentiality, the more the world unfolds: consciousness expands and the self-knowledge of the whole increases. Drawn to search by love, we move from one state of being, one world, to another. In Blake’s formulation: States exist, and men pass through them.” As our world changes, we and all else change too. The more we love, the more we search and are and know.

The fact is two, without the mediation of the third, remain apart, tend to separate, and move toward opposition. Without the creation of Adam, the creation of Heaven and Earth is incomplete. The creation of the third is crucial. Ensuring both unity and difference by its act of *witnessing*, it fulfills and completes, for the witness—in Latin *testis*, from *terstis*, the third—is the one who is transparently, selflessly present in the very moment of the two. Nothing separative interposes between the event and the witness, whose experience is direct, singular, and unique, seen through as much as seeing, a perfect image of the experience received. To be such as witness is to become a true human being. It is not surprising, then, that, according to Socrates, the Greek word *anthropos* (or human being) was originally a sentence and meant something like: “the one who looks up, is seen and sees, receives and gives back.” To be human in this sense is to be one who looks up, being seen and seeing, receiving and giving back.

But all such means are finally only means to another, more ineffable kind of knowledge. Plato alludes to this in his *Seventh Letter*, which also invokes the patience and persistence the search requires: “...after much converse about the matter itself and a life

lived together, suddenly a light, as it were, is kindled in one soul by a flame that leaps to it from another, and thereafter sustains itself." At this point, knowledge becomes wisdom and the search now a journey into it.

3. The Call

The search may be said to begin with a call. Life changing, a call is felt from *without*—through an event, a person, or a teaching—but is heard, answered, and responded to *within*, sometimes so deeply within that years elapse before the response becomes conscious. Nevertheless, it is the call, continually renewed, that sustains the search, ensuring that no finding is complete and no answer final, but always a call to further searching, “forgetting what lies behind and stretching forward toward what lies ahead,” which is infinite and never to be reached.

The call often seems to, and sometimes does, come suddenly, creating a rupture in one’s life. At the same time, it often comes as a gradual awakening, incrementally, repeatedly, through a series of calls. It is as if we must be called over and over until we begin to notice the effects and begin to respond. Hesitantly, then, we start to listen and our response deepens until we sense that we ourselves are the call: that call and caller are one in a life lived in obedience to the gift of the call.

At that point we become searchers. Search and call become continuous. Seeking becomes finding. Finding becomes seeking. We come to recognize that we were called from the beginning, "from the foundation of the world." As it draws us forward toward infinity, our calling also seems to echo back into the infinite past, beyond even time itself. Looking back, we cannot remember a "first" call. We seem to know what we are to do.

This is perennial wisdom. As James Hillman, explaining his “acorn theory” of the soul, puts it: “It is a worldwide myth that each person comes into the world with something to do and to be. The myth says we enter the world with a calling. Plato, in his Myth of Er, called this our *paradeigma*, meaning a basic form that encompasses our entire destinies.” Similarly, writing of the poet’s vocation, Allen Grossman confirms: “Behind what we call the ‘first’ always lies a hidden sequence of other ‘first’ experiences.”

It is as if our lives were a palimpsest of memories, each experience collapsing back through other experiences to the beginning of conscious life; and reaching still further back, as Grossman says “to the beginning of the world; and then, at last, to the great receptacle of all there is, the figure of no beginning.” And just as the call is without beginning, it is also without end. It comes over and over throughout our lives and, if we awake to it, our response deepens and our life changes accordingly. We become more conscious, more aware each time a call comes, that it does so at the living intersection of past and future. From one direction, the echoes up through time and memory from our source and origin, calling our “name.” From the other direction, it comes toward us as destiny, drawing us to an ineffable goal. Thus the search is without beginning or end. It is the journey that counts.

Like the event on the road to Damascus that turned Saul into St. Paul every true call is also a truth-generating Event. In this sense, an event is an orthogonal experience, entering our life at right angles from some other sphere, and blowing open a hole in our known experience of reality. Events of this kind knock one off one’s horse, and one spends the rest of one’s life working out their meaning.

4. The First Call: Father

For John Fetzer, the first call or “initiation” came very early with the death of his father. Since he was only two, he had few conscious memories, and spoke little of it. Little may therefore be said with certainty of its consequences. Yet, though hidden, like the loss itself, the wound must have been deep, and lifelong. Coming at the so-called “mirror stage,” when a child first says “I” and, identifying himself with his whole body, experiences himself as such—his father’s death must have opened the space for another, more transcendental identity than that concretized or “egotized” in the body-self. On another level, this death, the first of several that punctuated his life, also meant that, from this critical moment onward, consciously or unconsciously, he lived his search with the gift of death as a companion, a continual reminder of the call. To become death’s friend in this way and not turn away from the pain and sorrow of its wound means to understand its intimacy and unity with life—the intimacy and unity of the visible and the invisible worlds. As the poet Novalis said, to remember and live with death in one’s soul is to hold the wound—love’s pathway between the worlds—always open. Thus, though almost forgotten, we may also think of this first call as a first “circumcision of the heart,” a metaphor suggesting that death, especially of a loved one can create a gap, a space in the soul that opens a way to the heart, making

possible the union of our deep and surface selves. Even if fleeting, such an opening is the beginning of the long road to what tradition calls a “merciful heart,” a heart that loves the divine, the infinite being in the other, any other, every other.

Thus, just at the age when the fearful, self-protective, possessive power of the ego was about begin its process of crystallization, John Fetzer was “broken open.” A space was created where spirit could enter. Though the experience was largely unconscious, it bore the intimation that would make possible the later intuition of the universal ground of infinite and unconditional love. Put another way, the early experience of death and loss, understood as an opening to the spirit, provided, in the place of the enclosed, concretized ego, a twofold gift that would make possible the final intuition of freedom and of individuality or the true self. The twin processes of becoming truly free and of becoming a true self are hard to differentiate. In the search, the one defines the other. To be free is to realize one’s true “I,” while to realize one’s true “I” is to be free.

There is something else. Death, too, is the great revealer. If every call carries an injunction—“Learn this! It will change your life”—death clearly teaches the transience of all things, raising the fundamental question: If all that I receive and cognize through my five sense inevitably passes away and disappears, then what is real? How do I transform myself in order to know it? How must I change? How will the world then change? However dimly intuited, this question of questions is the beginning of the search for the “real self-awareness of reality”—reality’s self-awareness of itself—rather than the “subjective” awareness of an “objective” sense-based world, whose reality is inevitably passing.

Realizing all these is the fruit of a lifetime, but the path begins somewhere, with small steps. In John Fetzer’s case, we may note two things. First, following the death of his father, he seems to have understood that he would have to make his own life, to create his own world. Besides fostering creativity, imagination, and improvisation, this fact, if unconsciously, must have awoken in him the mystery of the participatory, world-making nature of our relationship to reality. At the same time, this incipient sense of “world-making” may be connected to his emergent “curiosity,” which he will later name as one of his dominant traits. Curiosity, if it is for its own sake, can be vice. However, for John Fetzer, as he recounts it looking back, it always took the form of wanting to know what lay behind or within what he could see—behind a wall or within an old building as a child, and later, as it were, the urge to understand the ‘hidden,’ unified structure behind the world as it was given.

A less exalted, but nevertheless significant, aspect of this first call must also have been the fragmentary, but significant image of his father that John Fetzer was able to build up from stories he heard—the image of the engineer, small-time entrepreneur, a tinkerer, jack-of-all-trades, inventor, and dreamer—an image still clearly visible in his own life.

5. The Second Call: “Mother”

For John Fetzer, the space that his father’s death left was “impressed,” as warm wax is impressed by a seal, by his mother, who was already the dominant presence in his life. No single event marks her call, which as with all mothers must have begun with the first touch and eye contact. But from that moment on, the power of her example acted as a ferment to shape his soul. She did this by how she lived and who she was. The spiritual power transmitted by her being filled and inseminated—almost, we might say, as a channel of grace—the space opened up within him. Thus, she became the ground and bedrock of his search, shaping not only the “outer” qualities of his character—his ethical nature, his care for others, and his practicality and frugal nature, and so one—but also the inner qualities that made possible the wholeness of his mature vision.

That John Fetzer was conscious of this is intimated in “Faith of our Fathers,” the Valedictory Address he gave later at Emmanuel Missionary College. His theme is “faith in a future whose possibilities we can believe in.” He begins invoking Wilfred Grenfell, the medical missionary. Other examples follow—Columbus, Franklin, Lincoln, and Garfield. Finally, emphasizing how such faith must permeate every aspect of our lives and all our relationships to become “a magnetic influence for good,” he turns to an unexpected source:

My mind goes back to the one to whom we must pay tribute for the purest and highest type of faith that humankind can bestow upon humankind, *Mother*. The very word is expressive of that noble, excelling faith which has meant so much to us. The very word is expressive of that noble, that excelling faith, which has meant so much to us, If we seniors will stop to reflect, we shall recall that many times during our sojourn here, it seemed as if the clouds of darkness would banish

noble achievement from our doors forever. But then, like a ray of sunshine, coming through a window, the exalted faith of *mother* would penetrate our souls and again faith would illuminate our lives and we would press toward the mark.

The immense ethical value and psychological strength that a mother's love and faith can inspire is well known. But more is implied here.

According to ancient teaching, the virtue of the soul (or *anima*) is *faith*, while that of the spirit (or *animus*) is knowledge. Faith seeks, spirit finds. In the Christian tradition, the figure of faith is Mary; and the figure of knowledge is the one to whom she gives birth. This implies a path. In Meister Eckhart's words, "I must be Mary, and give birth to Christ." In this view, faith—poverty of spirit, purity of heart—is the soul's true ground, that active-receptive capacity that is able to assent, to say "Yes," "Be it unto me according to thy word" unconditionally. With such a "Yes" as Mary spoke to the Angel Gabriel and Jesus embodied on the Cross, then, Spirit enters: the future takes form; the heart's opens; the divine gift of love, forgiveness, and compassion flows down uniting with the one love and beauty flowing throughout creation. "*Omnia Conjungo*" (I unite all), says Sophia.

Della Fetzer, the herald and medium of this call was a gentle, loving, deeply spiritual and religious soul. She was also practical and frugal, efficient and creative, with a good business sense. Hers was the peace-loving, non-violent, all-forgiving Christianity of the Gospels. Of Pennsylvania Mennonite stock, "plain people," her faith was who she was, not limited to Sundays, but permeating her whole life. As John Fetzer put it, "Mother was never what you would call a Bible-thumping disciplinarian, but she was always filled with a great deal of love and understanding. She had sympathy and love for almost everybody..."

Church was central during those years. The family attended the Methodist Church and Religious Camp Meetings whenever possible. Later Della would convert to Seventh Day Adventism, which, like everything she did and was, would also have its formative effect. But the first and generally deepest gift she gave her son was to allow him to live freely and independently in the air of the Gospel teachings and the reality of the spirit. These grew to feel so natural to him that both she and his grandfather said of him, "John's going to be a preacher." But this was a misreading. John already knew he was going to be a businessman. His mother's labors to make ends meet, as well as family stories of his father, as well as his own sense of destiny, had convinced him of that. But this did not mean that he did not also sense a spiritual calling. But although deeply imbued with what Christ had taught and he read the Gospels in school when he should have been listening to the teachers and was close friends with, and loved as a father figure, the local Catholic priest, John Fetzer was always more "spiritual" than "religious," which indicates just how deep his mother's call went: deeper than any particular religious form.

We may ask what call John Fetzer heard in the Gospels that led him to read them in his spare time. Certainly one motive leading him to do so must have been his desire to find out for himself what "lay behind" his Church experiences, his friend priest friend Father Hortiman, and above all his mother's life. But what did he find? What continued to call him? First, one imagines, the exemplary figure of Jesus, the model for a divine-human, the life servant-lover of the Father, humanity, the Earth, and the cosmic-human future. Second, of course, the seminal teachings: those related to the call for a second birth—the death of the old self and the birth of a new self "out of the spirit"—and those invoking the primacy of love, forgiveness, and a life of sacrifice and service as the path to it. Third, he must have been fascinated and drawn by the "miracles," which not only suggested the possibility of as yet undeveloped potential human states, capacities, or "powers," but also that the world itself was miraculous, and that the divine presence in creation was not only active in the phenomena of nature and cosmos as science sought to reveal through its search for the "laws of nature," but was also active providentially and spiritually in "miraculous" phenomena such as prayer and spiritual healing. Thus we may wonder whether for him—since, like Christ Jesus and the universe itself, we too are divine-material beings—these two, science and miracle, already stood *under one law*.

At the same time, he was spiritually curious about everything, and filled with wonder and gratitude in the face of existence. He was able to approach the world without preconception; he loved animals and nature, athletics and school friends; he was a dreamer, an apprentice visionary, an explorer; and, above all, he had a profound sense of an invisible, supersensory world within, behind, above, and below the visible one.

One call leads to another. Initiation is layered and sequenced, a process. Events, encounters, and experiences build and transform consciousness over time. Conviction deepens. At the same time, providence works with what the vessel of our lives provides. Given this, what happened next is not surprising. His mother had established a milliner's shop in a Department Store, in which there was an elevator, which John was sometimes allowed to operate. As he tells it:

I think the name of that department store was Shortels. I had this dream. I dreamed that I was in that elevator shaft and I was holding upon the leg of Jesus Christ. He was going up, and I was hanging on, going up the elevator shaft with him. The connotation of that as I interpret it, is that "I will always be with you." *I would say that that gives you the first tip as to where I come from.* The first tip. I was ten or eleven years old.

The account of this experience—one of the unfathomable secrets—exists in different versions, as told to different people. Sometimes it is told not as a dream experience, but as an actual visionary one. Whichever is the case, the substance remains the same. Jesus is going up. John Fetzer is “holding on.” As long as he holds onto him, he is carried upward. What is interesting—“*the first tip as to where I come from*”—is the interpretation: “I will always be with you.” That is to say, a twofold conviction: Jesus, always with him, will always bear him upward, onward, guiding him, aiding him in his search, his journey, and that for this reason he can trust that he will go where his supposed to go, no matter how lost or stuck he may feel, or how long the journey takes.

Another aspect of this “elevator” experience is brought out by comparing it with Therese of Lisieux’s very different one. Therese famously writes:

We are living now in an age of inventions, and we no longer have to take the trouble of climbing stairs, for...an elevator has replaced these very successfully. I wanted to find an elevator, which would raise me to Jesus, for I am too small to climb the rough stairway of perfection. I searched in the scriptures for some sign of this elevator...and read these words. : “Whoever is a little one let him come unto me.” And so I succeeded. I felt I had found what I had been looking for...
The elevator, which must raise me to heaven, is your arms, O Jesus!” (*Story of a Soul*, italics added)

The differences are telling: John “holds upon” Jesus Christ, while Therese is “lifted up” by Jesus’ arms “like a child.” The one is active, an act of will, while the other is more passive. John’s relation to Jesus is one, if not of equality, then one of friendship: they are journeying together. Therese’s “Little Way” is that of a child to a parent. Hers is the way of “spiritual childhood,” while John, though only ten or eleven, already stands on his own feet. Trust and love, however, are common to both. Both imply *unconditional trust* and equally *unconditional love*, for only unconditional love makes possible trust of this kind.

It is also telling that, in retelling the event in old age, reflecting one imagines his childhood experience, John uses the phrase “Jesus Christ” and not simply “Jesus,” which implies that the figure in the dream or vision is understood to be divine-human. Without reading more into it than is justified, we may say that this in turn implies that John sensed then (and knew later), perhaps from his Gospel reading, that human nature and divine nature, God and cosmos, potentially were not (or no longer were) two but one: that divine nature is within the evolutionary world and that there is no transcendent outside. That is, what is beyond being is within being, in *this* world. This means that one need no longer seek causes or explanations outside experience, for each thing in experience is potentially infinite in depth and height.

Perhaps, too, he already intuited that reality is a non-dual, “engodded,” spiritual-material world, a non-exterior world that awaits only our realization of it—which is the condition of our being able to become co-workers in the “spiritual work of the Creator.”

7. The Fourth Call: Radio

Around the time of the elevator experience, or just a little later, through his brother-in-law and close friend, Fred Ribble, the magical new world of radio and broadcasting entered to change John Fetzer’s life and give a new, more conscious direction to his search and questioning. An awakening event, he received its call without hesitation. Its reverberations would last a lifetime, giving him a professional vocation, a first sense of his life task, and the beginnings of a cosmology.

Here was a new, modern, technological unknown: an invisible world within the visible world that was able to become audible and visible. Here was a “material” analogy or figure of the spirit, even the Holy Spirit, suggesting that spirit and matter were one: that the universe was one spiritual-material whole. Inaccessible to the senses, but accessible to instrumentation, the invisible world of radio penetrated everywhere. It spoke, it played music; it could comfort, inform, entertain, instruct; and everyone of whatever race, creed, or color, could hear and participate. Thus it was completely democratic: an engine of universal freedom that could ultimately connect the entire planet. Creating unseen bonds between people, irrespective of their station, it could create community, locally and globally. It could even act perhaps as force of peace. It seemed to contain all. It was universal and particular.

Thus, what began naturally and enthusiastically as a passion and a hobby was not only a practical activity and the possibility of a profession, but also a school for questioning, creativity, and the visionary imagination. All that was lacking was a teacher.

8. The Fifth Call: The Creator

No search, no life is without its doubts and confusions. States of heightened awareness, when the possibilities seem greatest, are often accompanied by the deepest questions: What is real? What is my life for? Who am I really? What is truly essential? What is the meaning of life? Such ultimate questions push a person beyond the ordinary field of consciousness. They have no general, conventional answers, but can only be answered experientially and existentially. They call each of us individually to transcend our daily sense of self, pushing us beyond our experience of ourselves as the center of the world for which every answer is utilitarian and self-oriented: an “answer for me.” They must be broken through from a deeper or higher place. Something must occur where our sense of being the center of the world is overturned. Ordinary moments of uncertainty, confusion, and self-doubt are usually insufficient for this. Life and its difficulties may prepare us, but true breakthrough is unattainable without help from elsewhere.

For John Fetzer, it came in the fall of 1918. It was the height of the Spanish flu pandemic, which would kill more than half-a-million people in the U.S. alone. Like millions of others, John caught the virus. Developing complications, his condition became extreme. At this point, which is the heart of the story, the telling of it becomes obscure because, although “sharing” the key points of his life with others, John, who understood the need for mystery, was also always careful not to reveal too much. Nevertheless, as Carol Hegedus writes, this much is clear: “The revelations he had during his illness set the course of his life.” Yet the only account we have is slight. John is very sick. He is lying in his bed in an extreme state, perhaps unable to communicate. Others are in the room, including his doctor. During this moment, as he recounted it:

I thought from the remarks I heard that I wasn’t going to make it. I made a commitment at the time that if I were permitted to live, I would devote my life to the spiritual work of the Creator...That was the prime commitment I made at that time.

Thus John Fetzer pledged his life “to the spiritual work of the Creator.” He gave his word, affirming that his word would be sealed and fulfilled by his actions. But to whom did he do so? His shorthand account is unclear. If his commitment is to be true, it can only have been to the Creator. He was not simply challenging fate, or chance. For who else would permit him to live (determine he die)? Because his pledge is to the Creator, he does not have to guarantee it by anything else. The Creator is both the recipient and the only witness of his vow. It is a secret between them, carried in his heart for the rest of his life. This is immense. Were he to break his word, he would betray not only his vow, but also his Creator, and himself. But only he would know that his commitment had become meaningless. As long as it remained unbroken, however, it would be the hidden engine—the secret—of his life and search.

A vow of this kind, which is a decision, depends for its authenticity precisely on faithfulness: on faith. It has, as Giorgio Agamben puts it, “a performative proximity to the profession of faith.” In this sense, John’s “commitment” is also a sealing of that faith he received from his mother: his commitment becomes a first conscious articulation of its content. But, in addition to faith, fidelity to a vow—for instance, a marriage vow—also requires the kind of patient, stubborn, steadfast determination that John Fetzer showed in so many ways.

What occurred cannot have been a simple “deal” or “exchange”—an “if you do this I’ll do that.” Something much greater and deeper must surely have framed and preceded this experience. For instance, one might hypothesize that, during the hours, or even

seconds, in which he contemplated, with what must have been single-minded concentration, the very real possibility, even the likelihood, of his imminent death, the question of who he was and the meaning of his life must have become a sudden, transcendent reality—one that filled his entire being, so that he himself became the question. If something like this happened, then, as the trivial, ego-centered field of his hopes, dreams, and expectations—his own very being—were called into question, and he became the question, something like an experience of enlightenment—or the seed of it—could also have occurred. Zen Buddhism calls such an experience the great Doubt, in which the self and all things are transformed into a single doubt. From this experience, then, it is said, one's "original face" arises, and "heaven and earth become new."

Putting this another way, we may imagine that in this moment, faced by what he thought of as his imminent death, John experienced his absolute powerlessness, his utter helplessness, to effect his own future, indeed, his salvation. In such instances of the total experience of one's own powerlessness, that very powerlessness (or nothingness) becomes the field able to receive God's love and grace. In other words, one comes to experience the reality and confirmation of faith: the working of the Spirit as the God's love actualizing a true bond between him and the Creator. Perhaps it is unlikely that anything so profound occurred, but it is likely that some version of it did occur: a profound and transformative experience, bearing many seeds that would take a lifetime to germinate.

The vow itself can be read two ways: as devotion or service to the work that the Creator does—the commitment to become a "co-worker" with the Creator in the Creator's work—or as the fulfillment of the work that the Creator commissions. In the largest sense, probably these two are one. There is also the secondary question: who, for John Fetzer, was the Creator? Assuming the language is still essentially Christian, does he mean simply "God" the Father? Or does he mean Christ, the Logos or Word: "through whom all things were made"? Or does he refer to the whole Trinity. Or perhaps his experience was not so specific. Perhaps deep within his prayer was rather his mother's sense of the Spirit as the "*Love that creates and sustains life.*"

Taking the work of the Creator as what the Creator does, that work is obviously creation. The Creator creates: either himself or some other. Which ever is the case, as John would already have known, the Creator's purpose (from which from which he never deviates) is to become all in all. From this point of view, the work of the Creator is divinization or, less theistically/religiously stated, the spiritualization of the whole, that is, of creation itself. From this point of view, creation is not an act or a thing but a process. It has less to do with things as such, with planets, stars, and galaxies or the constitution of matter as with the living whole: that is, with the unified complex of interdependent, interrelated states of relationship or consciousness *that manifest being*. Consciousness after all always implies some one in relationship to some other. Ultimately, this relationship is always the relation of the divine—the Cause or Source—to itself. The divine loves; it seeks to realize this love in loving and knowing itself through itself in creating the cosmos, in which it has revealed itself for that purpose. Isaac of Nineveh, for instance, teaches that God is limitless, unconditional love for humanity and creation, and for himself. As he puts it: "In love he brought the world into existence; in love he will bring it to its transformed state; and in love will it be swallowed up in the great mystery of the one who performed all these things; in love will the whole course of creation finally be comprised." In other words, the work of the Creator is love.

From this point of view, John's vow was, from the beginning: to love, to do what he did, to serve, with great love. Not for his own sake, but for the sake of the Creator, to serve the coming of the Kingdom.

We may also ask: How close to death did John Fetzer come? Though he never spoke of any near-death experience, perhaps he came close enough that, at the same time as questioning the meaning of his life and the basis of his own identity, he left his body at least long enough to experience his true identity as other than his ego and as, in itself, self-arising and self-existent, that is, undying. To have done so would only have reinforced the process of self-questioning—the Great Doubt—he was simultaneously experiencing.

That this might be so is suggested by John's active interest, following his own encounter with death, in spiritualism and its investigation of human lives after death. Spiritualism, not necessarily viewed as antithetical to Christianity, was then still an active, dominant presence in people's spiritual lives. John had grown up in its ambiance. It was natural to him. It had framed his early interpretation of the spiritual significance of radio and broadcasting. Though he rarely spoke of it, we may surmise that it formed a basic aspect of his spiritual heritage. Like many others, too, he had lost many friends, and especially one particular friend, to the flu pandemic. We should not be surprised then to find him, following his recovery, visiting Camp Chesterfield, the spiritualist center in Indiana.

What transpired, we do not know. We do know, however, that the search by means of mediums of all kinds for confirmation of the real existence of a spiritual, invisible world, hidden within this world and accessible to it, remained for many years a central aspect of John's search.

9. The Sixth Call: Nikola Tesla

Finally, in 1919, when John Fetzer was 18, the actual teacher of whom it is said, when the student is ready the teacher appears, appeared. He did so not in person but in the form of the writings of the eccentric genius, electrical and mechanical engineer, physicist, inventor, and cosmologist, Nikola Tesla. John was certainly ready for him. *He was taking classes at Purdue University when Tesla's work "My Inventions"—part autobiography, part science, part confession and self-examination—began to appear serially in The Electrical Experimenter. As John puts it, "Tesla became our Bible."*

Tesla, of course, was the creator-inventor of, among other wonders, alternating current polyphase engines and generators, reversible magnetic fields, radio transmission, electronic tubes, wireless transmission of electricity, and Tesla coils. An extraordinary visionary and meditator, a searcher, on the path of self-development, he was gifted with a photographic memory as well as with many "parapsychological" abilities. Believing that ideas found their manifestation in creative, intuitive thinking, he held that "The gift of mental power comes from God, Divine Being, and if we concentrate our minds on that truth, we become in tune with this great power." Able to cognize suddenly received images, he realized the ideas they contained were fundamentally different from those derived by analysis or logic: that they came from "above." Tesla was thus able to visualize his inventions and could proceed to constructing them without further experimentation, drawings, or models. At the same time, alone and without companions, this Serbian son of an Orthodox priest worked continuously to create a cosmology that united spiritual and material processes. As he put it: "My mother had taught me to seek all truth in the Bible."

In this cosmology, couched in the scientific, physical, material language of electronic states, but frequently invoking spiritual states and realities, the universe is a dynamic unity, a living being: a holographic, living, luminiferous electronic organism, in which each part contains the whole. Electricity itself—the electronic state—is a fluid continuum with properties of perception and consciousness and rooted in an undifferentiated field in which time, space, energy, and the formation of matter arise as a consequence of resonances in a light-like "Ether," sometimes referred to as Akasha, and acted upon by a creative force called Prana. Mention of the Ether (never mind Akasha and Prana) clearly places Tesla's cosmology elsewhere than in orthodox science.

In other words, Tesla, who was not in any formal sense an esotericist or occultist, was willing to seek wisdom wherever he could find it. He was an "outsider," an independent freethinker. He followed his intuitions, imagination, and insight, which he manifested in experimentally determined phenomena, wherever they led him. He was as happy to speak to and exchange views with mystics and philosophers like Walter Russell as with scientists like Lord Kelvin or William Crookes. Neither explicitly religious nor spiritual, nor drawn particularly to psychic phenomena as such (since for him everything was "material"), he nevertheless bore his Orthodox background in his bones, and happily studied and drew on Buddhism and Vedic philosophy. In this spirit, he developed a friendship with Swami Vivekananda, who impressed him with accounts of ancient Indian Vedic and Samkhya cosmogony and was himself impressed by Tesla's visionary presence. The two men learned from each other. After one meeting, Vivekananda wrote: "This man is different from other Western people. He showed his experiments with electricity. His attitude to electricity looks like an attitude to a living being. He speaks with it and gives orders to it. I speak about the highest degree of spiritual person. It is no doubt that he has a spirituality of the highest level and can call all our gods. I his electric multicolored lights, I saw all our gods: Vishnu, Shiva... and I felt the presence of Brahma himself." After another: "Mr. Tesla was charmed to hear about the Vedantic *Prana* and *Akasha* and the *Kalpas*, which according to him are the only theories that modern science can entertain."

But there was more in Tesla to inspire the young John Fetzer besides his cosmology, his unitary vision of spirit and matter as one—one light—in consciousness and electricity, and his seeking correspondences and wisdom in all traditions and all places. Among others, there was Tesla's deeply ethical stance on science as necessarily an ethical venture—that is, on science as necessarily the expression of the onto-epistemological ethic of the scientist. There was also his lifelong "work on himself," not only ethically but also and preeminently in the importance he gave to the development of his own capacities of thinking, imagining, and intuition—his initiatory view of life. There was further his dedication to the human-cosmic *future*, to the long view—to imagining and bringing the

future into being. Finally, there was his independence: his hewing his own path in science as a path of exploration, invention, irrespective of conventional wisdom. Above all, perhaps, there was his monism, his blurring of the lines between a material and spiritual science. All these were powerful seeds for John's search. Indeed, it might be said, Tesla was his first "research topic," an immediate result of which was that he gave up all thought of engineering as a profession. Rather than succumbing to any conventional paradigm he would become a businessman and—privately, in secret—follow his scientific and spiritual vocation as his own, intimate, esoteric quest.

10. The Seventh or Last Call: Grit

Though other and significant "calls" would continue to come, the "call" phase of John Fetzer's life drew to a close with his discovery of Tesla. He was now prepared and equipped in soul and spirit. Thus initiated, the search itself would take the next sixty-nine years of his very long life.

The very length of the journey intimates a key aspect of it, previously unmentioned, though suggested by Tesla's wholly future-oriented stance. Current students of creativity like Angela Duckworth and Jonah Lehrer speak of "grit" as necessary for focused intelligence and intuition to come to fruition in a person's life. The ratio of inspiration to hard work in a life of accomplishment is well known. Francis Galton in *Heredity Genius* (1869) already noted that notable achievements were possible only when "ability combined with zeal and the capacity for hard labor." But "grit," in the new sense, implies more than stubborn, persistent perseverance, and the ability never to give up, no matter how difficult things become. Perseverance of this kind is clearly part of it. Yet, if it is not to become mere doggedness, perseverance also requires a framework: a "big picture" or overriding project that can generate passion and a long-term goal can sustain one's interest without deviation for years at a time. John Fetzer was certainly able to think in the long-term: he foresaw the work of Institute he created continuing its work for at least the next five hundred years!

The encounter with Tesla had marked the conscious foundation of two life-long projects: two searches to be braided together to shape the rest of his life. As a child, he had already intuited that he had a double calling: as a "businessman" and a "spiritual seeker." The discovery of "radio" and the revelation of its visionary, cosmological possibilities in Tesla had revealed both what his business would be and the nature of his search. At the same time, the cautionary tale of Tesla's lack of business acumen reinforced his sense of how important the practical, business aspect of his search was. Thus, consciously or unconsciously, he now formed the intention to "braid" together the two halves of his life, his two searches. The one would become quasi-public, exoteric; the other would remain, for the moment, private, inner, esoteric. How these would work together would become the great mystery of his life.

11. A School of Questioning

This braiding of inner and outer searches must have already begun at Emmanuel Missionary College (E.M.C.). Outwardly, aided by ambition, intelligence, enthusiasm, and what he must have recognized as grace (or guidance), John laid down here a solid basis for his professional life. What began in the nurturing setting of college life would lead, not without trials and difficulties, to a hugely successful career in broadcasting. Inwardly, the situation is more obscure. There is light and dark, insight and confusion. From this point of view, Emmanuel Missionary College was a school of questioning, one that increasingly also put him into question.

While he was happy, productive, and felt at home (or, at least, not out of place) in the religious atmosphere, at the same time he felt ill at ease. Awakened by Tesla, he had become a searcher, a questioner, and, in the depths of his soul, he was restless in his quest. Much of what those around him—good, caring, generous people—believed he could not fully subscribe to. The conventional path of rote-learned theology was not his. As he had always done, he would have to make his own path, forged by his own experience. Constrained as much by the dualism as by the fundamentalism around him, he became, as he put it, "very confused." Seventh Day Adventism was presented and accepted as absolute, the only salvational truth. But, in his heart he already knew, that, for him, the only truths were those he experienced for himself: that he had lived and discovered for himself. Reality, he sensed, could not be a matter of theory, of dogmatically opposing one abstraction to another. But he was still young. Experience had, so far, given him only certain things and only a taste of those at that. He still had a long way to go: he was hardly yet an apprentice in the matter of the

search. From this point of view, as he saw it, his only task was to keep an open mind. In this spirit, therefore, he continued to visit the spiritualists at Camp Chesterfield, where he must have plied the mediums with innumerable questions.

12. A School of Love

As Sappho already recognized, erotic love opens the heart, and begins the long, slow, sometimes painful process of opening the false to the true self. It sensitizes; it civilizes; it humbles. It ensouls the intellect, and brings to awareness the perceptive, cognitive aspects of feelings and emotions. Opening the skin-and skull-bound being to the reality of otherness, it begins to teach the art of living in-between. A kind of second birth, love provides a schooling in the virtues of the heart—without which there is no search.

In 1924, in the Emmanuel Missionary College chapel, where she was preparing to give a concert John met and fell in love with the woman, who would be his life companion for the next sixty-four years. Eighteen months later they would be married. For John, their meeting was at once a moment of destiny and a confirmation of the mysterious way in which consciousness participates in, and creates, reality. As he put it: “Rhea fit the the description of the girl I had decided to marry perfectly....that's the reason I knew what I saw her that she was the one I would marry.” What he did not yet know—and would take him perhaps a lifetime to recognize and certainly to realize—was that love was also the greatest teacher.

Rhea Yeager was beautiful, practical, social musically talented, well educated, a good thinker, fluent in French and able to teach Latin and English Literature. Courageous, sincere, and honest, she was fearless and direct in speaking her mind and would address any topic no matter how intimate. She had “grit,” like he did, and enormous confidence in his and their future. No matter what the troubles or problems were, she never once at any time doubted their and his ability to succeed. She was also, as John enumerated after her passing, “sensitive, compassionate, considerate, thoughtful, merciful, and gracious.” She never said anything harmful or evil of another person and was always willing to forgive. Despite her lack of knowledge in “spiritual matters”—which meant that John would have to travel his spiritual journey alone—she knew what “the bottom line” was. In his words: “All she knws is the bottom line. The bottom line is love. That's what the bottom line is. She knows that by instinct.” And that, the bottom line, she—love—taught him: that Love, which begins in passion and romance, becomes over time a school of devotion, sacrifice, and forgiveness.

13 The Cause of God

Chosen as class orator by graduating class, the valedictory address he gave, “Faith of our Fathers,” which he would later call the bones of “a pretty good creed,” sums up somewhat formulaically much of who John Fetzer was as he began the process of entering the world. There is first a deep, fully conscious sense of responsibility; of service; of the aspiration to “noble achievement;” and, above all, of *faith*—faith in the future—despite opposition, setbacks, ridicule, or apparently adverse circumstances. That is, of faith as the ability to seek new possibilities where others might see only finished, unchangeable actualities. Such faith, as he stressed, is more than self-confidence. It is a deep, all-inclusive *trust*—in life, in our fellow human beings, and in the workings of providence.

Clarifying what we have already seen as his commitment to “the spiritual work of the Creator,” he names such faith or trust as what is required for a person to succeed in what he calls here “the *cause* of God”—that is, God’s goal, or interest, or the *principle* for which He works. This principle or *arche*, God’s cause is love: to “become all in all” through love. Thus God’s cause ultimately, is that we become love, and contribute to the cause of all becoming love: that is, realizing its true nature as love. That is why, as John puts it, the faith needed—faith becoming love—must always be social and universal, all-inclusive (non-exclusive), actively lived with our fellow human beings, no matter what their station in life, so that by this means our faith, whose mother lode is “Mother,” can become a “magnetic influence,” one that draws people together through love. For those who acknowledge it, such faith—which finally, as he puts it, is “faith in an all-seeing, all-powerful God—is what one lives for, a program for life, a task self-evidently requiring continuous inner work.

14. Saturn Returns: The Search for Wholeness Begins

The phrase “Saturn return” refers to the planet Saturn, which, having made one orbit of the Sun, returns, after about 29.4 years, to the same degree in its orbit that it occupied at the moment of a person’s birth. Astrologically, this phenomenon is said to mark the completion of the first cycle of one’s life, and the passage into adulthood. It is an initiatory moment, One leaves behind childhood and youth to face the challenges of maturity. All that one has achieved (or failed to achieve) until then comes to fruition in what is often a prolonged interval of confusion. Significant, life-altering decisions are called for that will set the tone and direction for the next period of one’s life. Though it often is, this period need not be a challenge. For “old souls,” in fact, it is said to be a pivotal moment of clarity, opportunity, and the solidification of what progress has already been made.

John turned twenty-eight on March 25, 1929. He had been teaching Radio Transmission at Emmanuel Missionary College; dissatisfied and unable to see where it might lead, he left it to continue his studies in physics and higher mathematics at the University of Michigan; but it did not take long for him to realize that he was not suited to theoretical, academic work. The following year (1930), by grace and destiny, he was able to purchase his old college radio station. Finally, it was his own business. He changed its name to WKZO. He was twenty-nine. It was the Depression. One year later, 1931, he moved the radio station to Kalamazoo. Here he would remain until his death sixty-one years later. On the face of it, it was a momentous decision—not only for his business life, but equally importantly for his inner life, with regard to which he also made important decisions.

As for the business, it would take ten hard years to bring WKZO to full-time 5000-watt operation and make it one of the most powerful stations in the nation. At first, he did everything himself: “I was everything from president to office boy to announcer, copywriter, and sales department.” His wife managed the office, and took over when John was gone. A paradigm was established. An invaluable partner, for the long duration of their life together, Rhea Fetzer would make possible her husband’s braiding of inner “spiritual matters” and outer “business matters. She was at once his anchor, and his partner. In that sense, despite her lack of interest in spiritual matters, she was his permission to search.

Indeed, although one might think that building a business in the depression left no time for anything else, John’s need to develop himself inwardly was by now as necessary to him as the air he breathed. To continue to search, to question, to understand not only what lay behind and linked together his inner and outer calling and who he was, but also how such existential matters related to what lay behind and gave meaning to the cosmos and to the everyday world were by now second nature to him. Right from the start, therefore, alongside the radical decision to develop his own business, he took similarly radical decisions with regard to his inner life, which he now began to cultivate in a much more conscious manner.

15. Freemasonry, Spiritualism, and Spiritual Reading

Almost immediately upon arriving in Kalamazoo, John joined the Scottish Rite Anchor Masonic Lodge. By 1933, after just two years, he had passed through the stages of Apprentice and Journeyman and attained the status of Master Mason. As always, his commitment once made was total and unshakeable. Thirty-six years later, in 1969, in Boston, he would be coroneted Sovereign Grand Inspector General, 33rd Degree, and made an Honorary Member of the Supreme Council.

By becoming a mason, John was conscious that he was stepping into a history, which would lead him into his own history and the history of his country. Officially founded in London in 1717 and spreading rapidly throughout the Western World, Masonry laid claim to the entire evolutionary history of ancient wisdom as, throughout the ages from earliest times, various groups and guilds had transmitted it to the modern world where it was reborn and renewed at the close of the Renaissance.

Mixing with Rosicrucianism and Hermeticism, by the early 1730s masonry formed a small but vibrant part of Colonial spiritual culture and, within fifty years, had become the dominant spiritual orientation of those determining America’s destiny. Presidents Washington, Jefferson, Adams, Madison, Monroe and Jackson were all masons; as were other significant figures like Paul Revere, John Hancock, and Benjamin Franklin. Thus, by entering the Lodge, John, was aligning himself not only with a spiritual and intellectual tradition, but also with those who, out of this tradition, had worked to create American ideals.

Outwardly, Masonry provided a group of “Brothers”—like-minded, ethically-committed, seeking individuals, leading members of the community, drawn together by a non-sectarian faith in a divine source and ground of the universe, a fundamental

belief in freedom, the wholeness of reality, love as the highest power, and above all by the duty to act in the world for world's good: to serve humanity and "The Great Architect of the Universe" in a universal and ecumenical fashion.

Inwardly, Masonry, the last remnant of "the ancient Mysteries," reshaped for modern times by the Enlightenment, provided a sacramental system of ritual and symbolism, unaligned with any religion. At once an initiatory experience and a path of spiritual development, Masonry gave John for the first time a real, practical curriculum of self-discipline, inner work, purification, contemplation, illumination, and regeneration—in a word, soul-building or the inner construction of the Temple of Humanity," one with the Temple of the Universe. It also gave him a first sense, which would grow over the years into an understanding of what an "esoteric order" was and how it functioned that would come to fruition in his vision of the Fetzer Institute.

Such things are not built in a day. What began with a knock on the Lodge door would take a lifetime of searching. According to a leading Mason, W.L. Wilmhurst, a person turns to Masonry because he is searching for an element of his own being seems to be lost. He has lost his "center," his "Sun." Seeking that center, he approaches the Lodge in confusion, conscious of his moral imperfection, of ignorance, of restricted knowledge, of some deficiency in himself. The path opened to him begins by making him conscious that what he seeks is the answer to the primordial question: *Who am I? Where am I? Whence do I come? Whither do I go?* Inwardly, the prayer awakens in his soul: *From the unreal lead me to the real, from darkness lead me to the light, from death lead me to immortality.*

Entering the Lodge, he learns: "I come from the East, the source of Light and Life; such is my anterior state; I existed before; I am now a transient sojourner in the West, which is darkness; but to the East I must return." Thus, from an Ashlar, a rough, unhewn block, the mason seeks to become a perfect Cube. His apron symbolizes this: the triangular flap above represents the "Sun" of higher consciousness, aspiration, and emotion, the "Moon" of reason and intellect, and the "Master of the Lodge," the Will, while the square below figures the body. Such is the form of the complete human being. This he must become to realize the Temple in himself. He must choose the Light, for God is Light and the Cosmos is Light. Three "Lesser Lights" and three "Greater Lights," echoed in the three degrees of initiation, and teaching the primacy of Triads, guide and sustain him. First, he will see that three columns support the Lodge. These represent Wisdom (or the power of transformed thinking or meditation), Strength (from above), and Beauty (or true piety of soul). Second, he will see placed on the altar, the Sacred Scriptures, the Square, and the Compass—all three necessary to build the Temple in solid fashion.

Stainlessness of body and purity of mind are the preconditions: they make up the first degree. Thus the first pledge, the first degree: a life of self-discipline and purification. With the second degree, the deepening pledge comes contemplation. Fortitude, prudence, fervency, and zeal are prerequisites. Finally, with the third degree, comes death and resurrection—the return to the Light, to "the Sun in us," our long lost center, hidden deep within our being. Pure in body, soul and spirit, the mason dies to his old, egotistic self and to "all that to the eyes and the reason of the uninitiated outer world is precious and desirable." He now stands before the possibility of incarnating his highest self. Animated by a spirit of universal sympathy, he becomes a "brother to all that is, part of the universal life that thrills through all things."

Thus, implicit in masonic symbolism and ethos is a cosmological vision of wholeness and unity. If the "Temple" means anything, it meant that. It means that time and space, spirit and matter, humanity and cosmos are one living, conscious whole. This reality, as many Masons have attested, is often palpable at Meetings in the experience of the presence of spiritual energy circulating both within and between the members. Speaking of this, T. S. Sridhar cites the Anthem of the Secret Monitors in the Brotherhood of David and Jonathan:

Behold how good and joyful a thing it is, brethren, to dwell together in unity. It is like the precious ointment upon the head that ran down unto the beard; even unto Aaron's beard and went down to the skirts of his clothing. Like the dew of Herman, which fall upon the hill of Zion. For there the Lord promised his blessing, and life for ever more."

John must have found a resonance in all this with what Tesla had inspired in him! Realizing it, however, and finding wholeness, his self beyond the ego, would take a lifetime. Nevertheless, a direction was set and yet, as always, the search being nothing if not individual, John's creative embodiment of it took a unique form. Alongside his masonic work, he began to focus his energies on three different but related fields of research. Only later would their interconnection become clear. One field—although undertaken as a central aspect of the "wholeness" of the search for self-knowledge, he would find it led also to an aspect of

cosmological wholeness—was *genealogical*. This was another way to insert himself into history: to gain a historical perspective on his own and the nation's destiny. At the same time, he sought to learn to separate in his own life, what he had inherited from what he was in the process of creating. Starting in 1935, he set out to discover the history of his paternal and maternal ancestry.

Acknowledging those who had preceded him was not only an act of gratitude, generosity, and recognition, it was also an act of love and healing. Focusing loving attention on these souls, he felt he could help those “still trapped in darkness” to move toward the light. In other words: in addition normal forms of archival research, John also turned to Spiritualism—including its philosophy and cosmology, its mediums and methods (such as the Ouija board) and the search to develop faculties of his own. Thus Spiritualism became a secondary field of research.

Founded on the belief that the spiritual, invisible world and the material, visible world form one world, a single community of beings on both sides of the threshold, able to act and work together and support and aid (as well as obstruct and hinder) one another in all aspects of life, Spiritualism was well established as an integral and influential aspect of American spiritual life, and was particularly lively in the Midwest by the time John was born (1901). Essentially, it was not anything new. We may say it went back more than a hundred thousand years to the first human burials, but in its most recent form that of the medieval “communion of saints,” it suffered a partial eclipse. The result was that, during the early modern era, Heaven, which had been a crowded place, became desert, an empty place, where souls faced God, alone to the alone. A richer view then began to revive in the eighteenth century with the writings of the clairvoyant philosopher-theologian, Emmanuel Swedenborg, whose far-reaching influence penetrated multiple cultural, religious, and metaphysical spheres and prepared the way for the birth in 1848 of “modern” Spiritualism as an American phenomenon. This occurred in the village of Hydesville in upstate New York.

The first phenomena—various noises, displacements of objects, and so forth—were produced in December, 1847 in the home of the Fox family. There was nothing new in these familiar trappings of “haunted houses.” What was new was their interpretation: the use to which they were put, for after several months someone had the idea of “posing questions” to whatever was “rapping”—questions to which the rapper responded correctly. At first, the questions were simple arithmetical computations. Then, Isaac Post, a Quaker, had the intuition of using the alphabet, inviting the spirit to designate with knocks the letters spelling out what he or she wished to say. The “spirit” declared that he was a certain peddler, who had been murdered in the house and buried in the cellar. Thus, the *spiritual telegraph* was invented.

That is one side of the story. The other side is that it was noticed that phenomena occurred more frequently and successfully in the presence of the Fox sisters. Thus the idea of “mediumship” came into being and swept across the country. Soon many of those who witnessed these events, at first mostly women, believed that they had the same powers and that they, too, were “mediums.” This gave the burgeoning suffragette movement an enormous boost, for it allowed women to declare themselves independent of the male ecclesiastical hierarchy. Women became, in a sense, a new kind of priestess with a special ministry for the dead. “Spiritual circles” quickly began to form around them. Later, men too took on the some role. Thus, regular relations were established between “this world” and the “next” and the means of communication between the worlds were continuously improved. Table-tapping led to alphabetical dials, pencils attached to mobile boards, and so forth. “Scientific” research into apparitions, manifestations, and different orders of psychic and spiritual phenomena proliferated. Famous figures like Benjamin Franklin began to appear. Spiritualist, visionary philosophies like that of the seer of Poughkeepsie, Andrew Jackson Davis, began to be written. The overall impact was enormous. By around 1875 sixty percent of Americans claimed “spiritualism” as their religion. Meanwhile, esoterically, many occult groups began to form out of Spiritualism, above all, H. P. Blavatsky’s Theosophical Society.

Nevertheless, mediumship with its emphasis on atavistic or otherwise “special” psychic abilities, was a distraction. It took John many years to realise that it did not take mediums, psychics, or otherwise chosen people to enter into a true collaboration between the spiritual and earthly worlds: that, potentially, all called to this work, and can awaken the organs of perception appropriate to such states. At first, and indeed for many years, John did not trust his own capacities. Yet, in a way, he was developing them—uncossciously passing through such states—all the time. After all, it was he who instinctively (but intuitively), impelled not only by inner soul needs, but also, inchoately perhaps, by inspiration from “above,” formulated and did the research. It was he who asked the questions, and after much reflection and meditation interpreted and made his own what he had received. To do so was, in fact, his path, and by it he entered the process of experience, insight, and the development of faculties that would lead to the unfolding of his philosophy and cosmology.

To begin with, what he sought in spiritualism seems to have been threefold. Whenever he visited Camp Chesterfield and other spiritualist centers, or contacted (as he did) mediums and psychics of whom he had heard, three related fields of questions stirred him to do so. First, there was his desire to establish and acknowledge his own ancestral line and, as a sideline to this, try to make contact with loved ones he had lost), and further, we may imagine, to try to seek contact with great souls of the past to whose being he was drawn. Second, perhaps less consciously, there was his need to understand who he was: that is, knowledge of his own eternal being. Third, there was his philosophical search (inspired by Tesla) to explore through Spiritualism—which holds that he living and the dead, angels and humans, animals, plants, and minerals form one vast holistic web of cosmic Life—the outlines of a monistic, holistic cosmology.

At the same time, ever seeking unity, he never ceased to follow the latest developments in science.

16. American Metaphysical Religion

All of this permits us to say that—at one level at least—John was an adherent of what Catherine Albanese calls “American Metaphysical Religion,” which she views as the third stream in American religious life alongside evangelical Christianity and the liturgical mainstream Churches. According to Albanese, this stream of American religious life began in Colonial times with alchemy, Hermeticism, and Freemasonry, and then flowered in the nineteenth century with (among others) Transcendentalism, Swedenborgianism, Spiritualism, Theosophy, and New Thought. Those who follow this path, she writes, privilege “the mind in forms that include reason but move beyond it to intuition, clairvoyance, and its relatives such as “revelation” and “higher guidance.” On this basis, she writes, Americans of metaphysical faith believe that:

The human world and mind replicate—either ideally, formerly, or actually—a larger, often more whole and integrated universe, so that the material world is linked to a spiritual one. In this vision of “as above so below,” metaphysicians find a stream of energy flowing from above below, so powerful and constitutive of their reality that they discover themselves to be, in some sense, made of the same “stuff.”... Moreover, the influx of energy (let us now call it “divine”) that enlivens their world is a healing salve for all its ills and—in the strongest statement of their view—renders them limitless and divine...

To such views, given his scientific background and training, and his conviction of the unity or wholeness of reality, John Fetzer added his own passion to understand *intellectually* how so-called spirit and so-called matter work together *practically* in the actually lived world of sense and perception.

16. Incubation: “Steady drops hollow the stone.”

To seek is to enter a labyrinth. The search follows and does not follow a straight line, but seems to circle around an unknown, yet-to-be-discovered center. Fueled by the excitement of the chase and a passion for the unknown, the searcher responds to intuitions and invitations, pursues clue after another. Sometimes the intellectual need to know—the desire for knowledge rather than love of the unknown—can seem as much a hindrance as an aid. It can lead one into apparent dead-ends. But nothing is wasted. Mistakes, errors of judgment, personal shortcomings all play their part in the germinating seed of self-knowledge and knowledge of the whole. Commonly, in the early stages, rather than realizing that, in the end, one is oneself the true question, which one can find only for and within oneself, the search can lead to a temporary over-dependence on the outside, on others, to inform or initiate. Often, it takes a long time to recognize that one has a direct connection to the source.

The journey, then, is from theory to practice, from reading and thinking “about” to doing, from outer seeking to inner realization. Confident of his own intellectual and business abilities, John Fetzer, like all seekers, would have to walk the long road to realizing that he also had also—as every human being has—the capacity for experience and knowledge of another equally creative kind than daily consciousness provided. And yet, one can search only as one must. Each person has his or her path: one lays it down as one walks it. The path wends its way and one follows—or rather, perhaps, is drawn. From this perspective, considered in the long view, John Fetzer’s search was blessed.

The form, the vessel, now became an intimate braiding of esoteric and exoteric, of private and public, of inner work outer worldly engagement.

Inwardly, inferring from later statements and interviews, John's search, now consciously established, continued to deepen in three forms: Freemasonry; reading, reflection, meditation; and researching the ancestors.

He attended Lodge meetings faithfully whenever and wherever he could; he read masonic literature, speaking with fellow masons (and finding kindred spirits among them). In this way, his initiation into Masonry's mysteries and symbols continued with cumulative consequences for his soul life. It was a process of entering another world, one much larger and more inclusive in both cosmic and human terms than the one most people lived in. In a certain way, it must have been a lonely time. Yet he trusted in the unknown—that the seeds he was planting, by faithful practice, would germinate in their own time, first perhaps intellectually, but finally, in the heart. He trusted that unbeknownst new faculties were developing and would slowly manifest—that gradually, inward truths would become outward realities. Such is the search.

This process was aided immeasurably by the curriculum of study or chain reading, which Masonry and related interests opened up. One book led to another. Since his Tesla days, he had sought to understand the relationship or rather the unity (as Tesla had taught) of the world as described by science and the world of consciousness, accessed humanly through cognition, feeling, and will. Though he himself would not put it this way, he sought the relationship between ontology, cosmology, and anthropology: that is, the nature of the human being, which his reading led him to understand as at once evolutionary, historical, psychological, epistemological, and ethical—and, he intuited, much more.

It was this “much more” that he sought as he plunged into the various esoteric evolutionary and emanational cosmologies—Hermetic, Theosophical, alchemical, Rosicrucian, and Kabbalistic—that shared a common vision with Masonry. He was determined to leave no stone unturned. Over the following years, indeed into his seventies, he would study and explore countless esoteric literatures. His reading would expand to cover virtually the entire world of spiritual, mystic, and esoteric cosmologies—from Madame Blavatsky, Mabel Collins, Alice Bailey, and Baird Spalding through Plato and John of the Cross to Mesmer, Emerson, Swedenborg, Sri Aurobindo, Zen, and other Far Eastern philosophies. Nothing if not catholic in his search, John spread his net widely. His search would come to include strange, channeled texts like the *Book of Urantia* (and later, Jane Roberts *Seth* material) as well as the compendious works of Edgar Cayce and Manley Palmer Hall, whose *Secret Teachings of All Ages* became a favored work. He also studied the “religious science” of Ernest Holmes, as well as the more scientific philosophy Walter Russell. As he did so, he must have found many parallels with his old friend Tesla—both positive and negative. For many of these cosmologies—with their unfolding spiritual hierarchies, evolving planes of being and metamorphic chains of planetary incarnations—though striving to be monistic, were nevertheless still expressed in theoretical and often mechanistic language that reinforced the appearance of a matter-spirit duality. Stubbornly, then, the mystery persisted.

It was certainly another world he was entering: one that placed him in an infinite, ongoing process of world creation, life, and evolution, both cosmic and human—all unfolding from one Source, the creator, ground, and sustainer of all, to the Self-Realization of that Source in some form of “Being-Consciousness-Bliss.” At the heart of this cosmic process of divine self-discovery lay the infinite (divine) potential of the human being, one with the Earth, as the growing tip of evolution: the place or “double vortex,” where “blind” involution becomes “conscious” evolution, the two processes being continuous with the entire process. Within this general picture, as his reading moved from one tradition to another, he would have begun to sense the reality of the range of the planes of being and consciousness that human being was in his or her own actual and potential being. In the process, he would have noticed too an increase in his own ability to observe phenomenologically his own processes of consciousness. He would have begun to become aware of where thoughts, insights, dreams, intuitions came from—whether from above or below, from the subconscious or the supra-conscious, from the level of logic and the already-thought or from the creative world of living being-ideas. At the same time, he will have noticed the presence of certain “parapsychological powers” or the way in which consciousness was able to participate in and shape reality. Above all, in all this, what must have fired his imagination was the teaching that he found in many places that suggested that humanity was on the threshold of a new consciousness—what Sri Aurobindo, for instance, called the “supramental.”

One cannot underestimate the transformative effect of such reading, which never remains mere reading. The “information,” the sentences in which it is contained, the “imaginings” that it conjures, the connections and associations that it suggests—all of it, as the reader reflects, thinks, dreams, and meditates—ferment in and work on the soul, transforming it in its depths and bearing fruit in terms of insights, inspirations, and incentives to future research. And not just “reading,” for an important part of

this esoteric study was to meditate and reflect upon ancient books of symbols and cosmic diagrams. These, reaching back to Ancient Egypt, which, because of its putative “Rosicrucian” connection, became a great love and inspiration, constantly nurtured his soul and provided multiple moments of illumination.

The same is true, as far as the inner work of the search is concerned, of his continuing work whenever the opportunity arose with mediums, psychics, and clairvoyants. Here, again, one must look beyond appearances. For whatever is sought, however and wherever it is sought—whether insight into some person now long dead, an ancestor or, a person of historical interest, perhaps someone one has heard of or someone is studying who has sounded a note in one’s soul—what is found is found, finally, not in the words or signs of the other but, through the space in between the questioner and the speaker, in one’s own soul. That is to say, one is not looking so much for information or “facts” as for the inner response to these as it arises in intuitions, images, psychic resonances and so on. In this sense: what incubates is always at once self-knowledge and world-knowledge.

Adding to this, in another register, one may view the genealogical research as flowering in John’s soul in still other, yet similar, ways. Certainly, at some level, self-knowledge was the goal, but the process—the listening to it—will have gradually focused two further areas of resonance: first, history in general; second, America in particular. Both worked consciously and unconsciously to situate his place—his destiny—within an unfolding whole. History, in its minute particulars of the movements of consciousness, peoples, and families—their lives lived amid continuously evolving contexts of faith, science, art, and technology—dovetailed with the vast evolutionary landscapes of the esoteric cosmologies with which he was becoming familiar. At the same time, his focus was always himself—self-knowledge—how and who he was, by destiny and genealogy, an American, a citizen already of a new free world. Thus, the vision of America and what it was to be an American fired his imagination and inspired his faith in a new, conscious way.

This inner work was braided with his outer professional life, which, in some sense, we might say, functioned as his “monastery”—as the field in which whatever insights and inner growth he was experiencing could be practiced, honed, and tested. After all, every human life is a whole. One cannot separate professional life from private life. John’s life as searcher, therefore which is who he was by his own definition, though more or less hidden during this period, was inevitably and continuously interwoven with his life as a businessman. Implicitly and explicitly, all that he was learning and aspiring to inwardly was put to use in his practical life. Had he not done so, his search—indeed his life—would have inauthentic.

From this point of view, as his search was evolving, certain inviolable life principles were becoming clear to him. Not to live by these would have been a betrayal. First, never to doubt and always to act honestly and justly; that is, the primacy of trust and ethics. Second, to attend to insights, inspirations, and even dreams and take them as seriously as the fruits of logic and reason and act upon them. Third, on the basis of his growing knowledge and experience of the teachings of reincarnation and karma—that these were the warp and weft of human life—to act accordingly with all those with whom he came into contact with. Fourth, to act according his growing awareness of the interdependence of consciousness and reality.

Factually, outwardly, during this period, through hard work, patience and persistence, intelligence and a canny business sense, his broadcasting “empire” grew slowly but inexorably. Soon, he began to receive professional honors. Recognized by Washington, where he had spent time lobbying for directional antennas against the FCC—the landmark case 590, which changed broadcasting in the U.S.—he served during the War as Assistant Director of Radio Censorship and after the War, under general Eisenhower inspected radio stations in Europe. In 1946, he was named Chairman of the Committee on Freedom for Radio. Meanwhile, television was expanding and in 1949 he gained his first license for television broadcasting. New honors began to flow in, the business continued to expand. In 1954, already thinking of the future, he established the seed of the present Institute, the John E. Fetzer Foundation for religious, charitable, scientific and educational purposes. One dream remained, and two years later (1956) it came to pass. He purchased the Detroit Tigers Baseball Company. Twelve years later, in 1968, they would win the World Series. It was an inevitable moment of destiny moment, at once a spiritual gift and a natural turning point. Crowning his professional, outer, public life, he understood the way was open to bring into the world what he had carried so long within him: the secret, inner life of his search. But the search, his journey, endless by definition, was by no means over.

Sooner or later, after a long gestation and much persistence and dedication, the search moves toward fruition: the searcher approaches his second birth. "*This I Believe*" (revised 1967), a personal statement of fundamental principles, striking in its authenticity and honesty, announces the move. The tone is confident, fearless, and prophetic. With a mixture of inflation and humility, theory and experience, missionary zeal and innocence of heart, the seeker speaks his beliefs. On the surface, it is formal and awkward in its use of language, but beneath the words one sense a passionate, even poetic commitment to the unity and wholeness of what is—spirit and matter, Heaven and Earth, science and spirituality, humanity and divinity—one single evolving reality material-spiritual, divine-human, earthly-heavenly evolving.

Humbly describing himself as "a layman," the author begins with a blunt confession: he is "not *addicted* to church activity." The use of this strong word implies that, were he so addicted, he would be unfree, enclosed within an exclusive, reified conceptual-theological ideology, unable to think for himself and be open to the "new." At the same time, however, he stresses his "exposure to fundamental religious teaching" and the fact that he comes from "a long line of ancestral believers." In other words, he is not ignorant of conventional religion. Indeed he knows it well, but his faith is what he had made his own, forged with his own experience. He has seen through to the heart, the essence of religion. It is what he believes and knows and he is not afraid to speak his mind.

He comes directly to the point: "there is a crying need, the world over, for a new concept concerning the extra terrestrial order of things in relation to individual spiritual needs." "*Extra terrestrial*," again, seems an odd use of words. Yet perhaps it is not, for it invokes both the physical-scientific cosmos and the spiritual non-earthly celestial "heavens." In fact, as we shall see, the "extra terrestrial" of science is the heavenly or spiritual of religion and conversely. They are one and the same. Aware of the radical nature he is proposing, he disclaims any sensationalist intention. That human spiritual life today needs a new cosmology at once spiritual and scientific is simply what he believes. He will not try to prove what he proposes. It is not provable. "In the end you either do or do not believe..." Faith is all.

Next, prophetically—it is the revolutionary 1960s—he invokes "a new force which is influencing the mass mind, either for good or evil, depending upon the understanding of and the use to which that force is employed." In an almost Nietzschean manner, he invokes "a new race of thinkers coming on with herculean strides." Many "are bracing themselves for the new interplanetary environment." Science and theology will be shaken to their very foundations. A new, unitary planetary age of being is approaching.

Turning to his subject, cosmology, he begins with a conviction: "It is my view that scientific and spiritual forces find initial unification in the cosmos of outer space." What follows is, in a sense, more aspirational and inspirational than realized. Tesla's electromagnetic vision converges with esotericism and contemporary astrophysics, but the actual unification of material and spiritual forces still remains more or less only a juxtaposition. The one is simply stated to be the other. The nature of the unity remains unexplored: the language, the experience, is still lacking. Nevertheless, it is an amazing vision. Arising from the "Big Bang," our universe, one of many, orbits the Central Sun, where "Intelligence" is continually regenerated and reborn and simultaneously resonates throughout the whole.

This Sun, with its huge electronic ring raying out throughout the entire Cosmos, is then named. It is "the Cause of all Creation, the Universal Mind, the Supreme Principle, the Primal Cause, the Cosmic Field, the Divine Spirit, Infinite Intelligence, God the Father!" Physical humanity, the whole human body, is "created from and a counterpart of this Source of Power." It is an "intricate electronic device," vibrating with cosmic energy, a receptor of the Source. It is the subconscious mind, and it vibrates with intelligence. It knows all, sees all, and contains all inherited and acquired knowledge. Potentially, all human being have access to "total wisdom." Control, however, rests with the "conscious mind." Evolution in general and inner development in particular therefore depend on becoming aware and nurturing the relationship between the two minds. This occurs "under the guidance of Infinite Intelligence." It is a process of unification or wholeness that requires meditation, concentration, and self-control. There are no limits to what can be accomplished. "Illumination is a legacy awaiting all mankind." All self-imposed native concepts must be banished. All that is required is to "look within to see God's presence," and visualize one's goals, and practice affirmative, creative prayer. In this way, the healing power of the Source may permeate our every cell.

In this vision, the human is divine, but it is up to each individual to realize his or her divinity. Jesus, "the Master of Masters," is invoked, who teaches "that all, along with him, are Sons of God and that no one at any time has seen the Father of

Radiation.” In other words: “He who sees God in man has seen the Father. Man becomes the sole expression of the infinite Creator. ‘I and the Father are One’ becomes a truism.” Such is the fruit of “the love of God within.” It is to remove the veil and see “God in every face.”

In a word, “Love thy neighbor as thyself.” This is both the only goal for humanity and the path to its attainment.

18. A Course in Miracles

Clearly, the search was not over. In some sense it still seemed hardly begun. While marking an important turn, “This I believe”—as well as a more extensive statement of the same beliefs and principles, *America’s Agony* (written 1969, published 1972), which he included as part of his book on the maternal “Wenger” side of his family—still left much unresolved. The question of the unity of mind and body, spirit and matter still remained in the realm of theory and conviction, but not yet of experience. The appropriate language was still lacking. Nevertheless, formulating his convictions allowed him to lay down an approach—through parapsychological research and “energy medicine”—to what would become the immediate goal of both his search and the work of his fledgling Institute. At the same time, because unresolved issues remained, the larger search—and the inner destiny of the searcher—had to continue. As always, when passion, vision, conviction, and desire are strong enough, the world responds.

It did so with three transformative events, each building upon the other, with perfect timing. John was now in his seventies, “three score years and twelve,” the period of life when, according to some esoteric teachings, a person has worked through “old” karma, and is free, if only he or she realizes it: free to create new karma, something new for the world.

The first shift, which prepared for the others, came as a result of encountering the now classic volume (then only in manuscript), *The Course in Miracles*. Although a longtime daily meditator, John, as his writings and life make clear, was still led, indeed dominated, by his intellectual, mental being. This meant also, as it often does, that he was equally dominated by the ego’s will, pride, and ambition. Resolving these would begin the final process resolving his life questions. In this sense, meeting the *Course* changed his life: for he first time, inner work became truly *inner* work, a matter of the heart, the soul, the conscience, not the head.

The meeting came about through Judy Skutch Whitson, whom he had met and become friends with on the Board of the Institute of Noetic Sciences in 1974. The following year, Judy met Helen Schucman and Bill Thetford through whom the *Course* came into being. Immediately convinced that here was a document to begin the process of global transformation all were seeking. Determined to publish it, she began to send photocopies to a few select friends. John Fetzer was among them.

Two weeks after receiving his copy, after underlining and annotating nearly every word, he called and told her: “All my life I have waited for this. I’ve gone from feeling infirm to suddenly knowing that I have so very much to do. It saved my life.” Suddenly, viscerally, he had understood the nature of the “ego” and its illusion of separation. At the same time, the experience of the reality that “God is love”—“unconditional love”—was brought home to him in a new way. He saw that what had been a belief—that “love is the core energy that rules everything”—could begin to dawn as knowledge. So powerful, indeed, was the text’s effect on him that, though he had spent half a lifetime reading spiritual literature, its intensity was such that after a couple of pages he would fall asleep! Work with the *Course*, especially the *Workbook*, became a daily practice, worked on with his secretary. Within a year, they had organized a study group, which would meet for about five years.

The Course in Miracles is essentially an intense path of inner purification by a process of kenosis or self-emptying, of removing the obstacles to love. Expressed in familiar Christian language, it lays down a non-dualistic path of forgiveness and love to be lived in daily life. By letting go of—releasing—the separative, subject-object field of ego-consciousness, the student approaches the experience of the self-arising of phenomena in their suchness: “Release your mind and you will look upon a world released.”

Step by step, the student learns that pain, suffering, guilt, ignorance—and, above all, the sense of sin—are all illusions: projections of the separated and separating ego. Based on the illusion of subject and object, the ego, the Course teaches, “is quite literally a fearful thought”—one that leads it always to seek to control and dominate in order to protect itself. But the true self needs no protection; the self that needs protection is not real. Thus the student learns that the ego is not the self, but only a belief or thought, a construct of consciousness—which since it made it, it can unmake it.

Nevertheless, though it is nothing the ego is most powerful. It gives us our paradigm of the world. Egotism, greed, vindictiveness pervade our thinking. All our actions are based on separations, oppositions: self and other, subject and object, citizen and stranger, friend and enemy, humanity and nature, earth and cosmos. This is because ego-consciousness objectifies and projects, giving us the illusion of *distance* and material causation. We experience ourselves as distant from one another, distant from nature, distant from the stars, distant even from the spiritual world. And distance in turn gives rise to the urge to separate, dominate, control, manipulate—and even lie—in the course of which hate becomes easier than love and prejudice than openness. In other words, we lack *intimacy*—with the world, the divine, and ourselves. At the same time and for the same reason, we lack a spiritual understanding of the fundamentals: space, time, light, causation, gravity and so on. Above all, of course, we lack knowledge of Life—not just of biological life, but also of the indivisible, invisible Life that animates the cosmos: Cosmic Life.

The antidote, of course, is love. The *Course* does not “teach” love, for love is beyond what can be taught: it only removes the blocks to love’s presence, which is the presence also of truth. The key here is forgiveness. More than learning to forgive, it is to live forgiveness. Forgiving is the Course’s path of self-emptying, of release, of letting go of fear, anger, pain, judgment, defensiveness and so on, which are the illusions that reinforce the ego and obstruct access to the true self that is in its own reality whole, transparent, and empty, without boundaries or limits, and perpetually open to the Spirit of Love.

It is a process of forgiving, not of being forgiven, for we are always already forgiven—that is our true nature. Paradoxically, however, true forgiving is possible only through the realization that there is nothing to forgive—that all the wounds, scars, and painful memories, all the remorse and regret, are only ego projections, that is: illusions. In recognizing there is nothing to forgive, one is absolved. In that sense, true forgiveness is release: it does nothing; it releases all. “Unforgivingness,” on the other hand, pursues its emotionally charged willful course stubbornly, vindictively, purposefully, poisoning one’s life. The first task, then, is to realize that what we attribute to the other is really in ourselves: it is our own projective guilt we must remove. Removing it, the Spirit—which is the Spirit of Forgiveness—can enter. As we give away, so we receive.

Working through such material—and much, much more—at a deep psychological level must have had the effect of initiating a purifying baptism into a new life. It was a process of lightening: all the burdens he had been carrying at great cost were lifted. They were simply gone. He had cast off the shackles of a lifetime’s of projection, of the will-to-power, the overweening, ambitious will-to-will—the “strong will,” enmeshed in the projection of material causality—and experienced in its stead the peace, joy, and healing presence of Love, of the Spirit, made possible by receptive non-willing: the gentle will.

Philosophically stated, he was able to see the path to becoming free from the chains of representational thinking that made the unity of spirit and matter unthinkable. After all, the “illusions” and “projections” produced by the “separated” ego are only, from another perspective, the concepts and representations required by the subject-object field of consciousness—the field that makes it impossible to realize unity, whether the unity of consciousness and world, mind and body, or matter and spirit. From the fundamental fact of psychological release achieved through the intense, deep inner work of forgiveness, he must have experienced the first glimmers of non-dual consciousness: of the ability to allow and know phenomena to arise in their own being “just so,” without first having to name or form representations of them. Letting go of projections—of judgments, concepts, as well as habitual patterns of response—riding as it were the presence of being—unconditional love—now lay before him as a possibility.

Cosmologically, too, the Course provided an answer: the one substance, the unity that he sought, was Love. Now, he could understand, like the great saint and mystic, Isaac of Nineveh, who taught that God is limitless, unconditional love for humanity and creation, and for himself, how: “In love he brought the world into existence; in love he will bring it to its transformed state; and in love will it be swallowed up in the great mystery of the one who performed all these things; in love will the whole course of creation finally be comprised.”

19. A New World

The effect of the inner work with *The Course in Miracles* had been to open him in new ways to be the world, which was now becoming one, visible-invisible. His inner and outer lives, now one life, became richer. His experiences, whether in human encounters, meditations, or dreams became filled with deeper meaning. He sensed a new meaning for his own life, too, as well as for the vision he had for the Institute that would carry on his life work. His sense of destiny, of what he was called for, began to open onto wider, deeper, higher horizons. He sensed that as he was entering experientially into a new consciousness, the world and humanity

was also doing so too. Cognizant of esoteric traditions, and thus not alone in this, but above all confirmed by his own dream experiences, he connected the global transformation that he sensed was underfoot with a spiritual being, the Archangel Michael, the so-called “Regent of the Age.” As always, the searcher being ready, a providential encounter provided the next step.

Jim Gordon was gifted. From the age of five he knew consciously that the visible world is permeated by the invisible world: that, if we awaken to it, the world we live in is a spiritual world, one with the divine. At eighteen, he had placed these abilities and what he had learned from the angelic worlds—above all, from the being he knew as the Archangel Michael—in the service of the world. In this spirit, in 1967, he created the American Medical and Psychic Research Association. Sensing that humanity was in the process of crossing the threshold to a more holistic, selfless, and loving consciousness, he began to teach what he called the healing path of Love, Acceptance, and Forgiveness. Twelve years later, in 1979, he found himself in Kalamazoo giving a talk. In the audience was a young lawyer, Mike Gergely, who was John’s intimate confidant in planning what would become the Fetzer Institute and privy to its most esoteric aspects. Thus when he heard Gordon speak of the Archangel Michael, he knew he would have to arrange a meeting with John Fetzer. None could have been more timely or providential. As John later put it: “Jim was like the last piece of the puzzle. I had all the pieces, but I didn’t know how to put them together. Jim showed me.” As for Jim Gordon, he was taken by a spiritual presence that he had never before experienced: “There was something about his aura when I entered his office. I was in another world.”

Thus the search—now the awakening—took another turn. The two grew close, Gordon functioning very much as a guide or mentor to the new world John was entering. First, he put his abilities to mediate between the visible and invisible worlds wholeheartedly in the service of John’s questioning, searching nature. Although, in a sense, this was a simply continuation in more sophisticated vein of how, throughout his life, John had often consulted spiritualist mediums and psychics, this time it was different. Recognizing John’s own destiny and abilities, and developing an intimate relationship with him over time, he was able to encourage and help John to develop his own abilities by introducing him to new meditation techniques that were able to provide “real” experiences. As a result, perhaps Jim Gordon’s greatest gift was the gift of confidence that John received with gratitude and humility.

20. A Last Initiation

One last purifying initiation into the fullness of life remained. For many years, at least since 1973, John’s wife, partner, and life companion Rhea Fetzer had been slowly declining. By the 1980’s she was in full-blown Alzheimer’s, with innumerable and continuous complications. John oversaw her care and saw her and cared for her as much as he could every day. As he walked with her toward the inevitable threshold, deep emotional layers of being were unlocked that had lain unharvested for many years. At first it was a painful process. He alternated between bitter cynicism and long periods of tears and heartbreak. To try to break the cycle—to see through the loss, the regrets, and the remorse—he began to review their life together. He did so wholeheartedly as a spiritual practice. As he did so, aided we may conjecture, by her presence, he understood what they had created together and what she had given him and what he not too could embody: how “sensitive, compassionate, considerate, thoughtful merciful and gracious”—and always willing to forgive—she had been and still was. Letting go of his projections, released, the last shackles fell away. He saw through to her essence, her soul, and connected it in the inmost depths of his heart with his own center and essence—his own Sun—and was taught, indeed initiated, by the experience.

In today’s world—today’s consciousness—few experiences are as transformative as the accompanying of a loved one across threshold and beyond. Witnessing the transition, living into the powerful reality of the unity of life on both sides of the threshold, shedding all the armoring and projections, letting all the obstacles and hindrances to unity fall away, is a life-changing experience. For John, it was an experience, as always, unanticipated, but prepared for by his entire life as a searcher—one that that both suddenly and gradually allowed him to embody in a new, personal way all that he had learned throughout his search: that love was all—and all in all. He was now truly free—not just in his intellect, or his will, but in his entire being as a child of God born in the unconditional Love of the Spirit.

21. Full Circle

Mysteriously, circle and search share the same root. Both derive from the Proto-Indo-European *sker, “to turn or bend,” through the Greek *kirkos* and the Latin *circare* “to go about, wander, traverse.” Thus: the searcher circles, spirals to unite center and circumference. Searching for wholeness, the searcher becomes whole.

On January 20, 1991, at the age of 89, John E. Fetzer died at his home in Hawaii.

A few days before he died, in his second floor living room, he looked out across the water and saw Jesus walking toward him. His life came full circle. Jesus, who had come to him in the elevator in Frankfort, Indiana, had always been with him.

He died silently chanting the names of God, a practice that he had learned and practiced with Jim Gordon. Going inward, absorbing and crossing the threshold on the wings of the Divine Qualities—which are also the Essences through which all creation evolves toward its divine fulfillment—we may imagine his joy in experiencing as he had never done before the true nature of wholeness, unity, and unconditional love.

The week before he died John Fetzer wrote to the Trustees and staff of the Institute he was now leaving in their care:

Remember, whatever the final verdict turns out to be, its summary will be “unconditional love.” That is the avatar of the future, because love is the unifying energy field that mobilizes the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual resources in the caring and sharing with one another.

Thus: a realized search, a realized life, is a path that moves from simplicity through complexity to return to simplicity in a new, conscious form. It is a process of being turned inside out, with the difference that there is now no outside. Inside and outside have become one. As in the Zen saying has it, “First there were mountains, then there were no mountains, and then there were mountains again.” Or, in the words of *The Ten Oxherding Pictures*, “One enters the city with bless-bestowing hands.”

Bare-chested and bare-footed, he comes out into the market-place;
 Daubed with mud and ashes, how broadly he smiles!
 There is no need for the miraculous power of the gods,
 For he touches, and lo! the dead trees are in full bloom.

Such, then, is the journey from desire to love, from desire for what can be known (knowledge) to love for what cannot be known (wisdom): the passage through illusion and reason to the Real.